

Helms Warns Of Excessive Curbs on CIA

By George Lardner Jr.
Washington Post Staff Writer

Former Central Intelligence Agency director Richard Helms urged Congress yesterday to restore what he called a spirit of "collaboration" with the nation's intelligence community instead of trying to pin it down with elaborate controls.

Testifying before the Senate Intelligence Committee, Helms suggested that the CIA had been seriously weakened by congressional and executive branch investigations of its misdeeds. Now, he charged, it is "hemorrhaging" with continuing leaks of its secrets, in books, in newspapers and elsewhere.

"If it continues, this country is going to be at a serious disadvantage," Helms warned. "The Russians are putting things into place. This is a time when our intelligence can't possibly be too good and when we can't have enough of it. To coin a phrase, we're certainly fiddling while Rome burns."

The hearing resounded with sympathetic senatorial voices. The session was called to discuss a proposed 263-page charter aimed at reforming the CIA and the rest of the intelligence community, but none of the committee members present spent any time defending it and some were openly critical.

Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.) charged that "under the pretense of reorganizing the CIA, we are making it impossible to do what it was created for"—which Moynihan defined as maintaining a policy of "being aggressively anti-Soviet."

Other committee members made clear that they are in no rush to adopt a legislative charter in the wake of the 1975-76 congressional and executive branch investigations of wrongdoing on the part of the CIA, the FBI and other U.S. intelligence agencies.

For his part, Helms protested that he had been a victim of those investigations. Now the head of a newly organized consulting firm allied with Iranian interests, the former CIA director was fined \$2,000 and given a two-year suspended sentence last Nov. 4 after he pleaded no contest in federal court here to two counts of failing to testify fully and accurately before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Helms, in effect, asked the Intelligence Committee to make sure nothing like that could ever happen again—by making CIA officials accountable only to the Senate Intelligence Committee and its House counterpart.

He told a reporter after yesterday's hearing that he didn't feel the Foreign Relations Committee, which was inquiring into CIA activities in Chile, had any right to demand his sworn testimony on the issue as it did in February and March of 1973.

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"After what happened to me legally," Helms told the committee, it became quite clear that no CIA official called before a Senate committee to give sworn testimony could expect to do so "without taking his pants down."

Helms was also vehemently critical of the presidential commission headed by former vice president Rockefeller that investigated CIA domestic misdeeds. In one such case he said he had been unjustly criticized by the commission for investigating newspaper columnist Jack Anderson in an attempt to determine the source of Anderson's leaks, particularly about the India-Pakistan war.

"It was an absolute hemorrhage in terms of intelligence information," Helms said, defending his decision to investigate the columnist under his obligation to protect the CIA's "sources and methods."

Helms asked the committee either to give the CIA director the clear authority to conduct investigations or to give someone else the job of protecting "sources and methods." Helms said the CIA had never been particularly successful in asking the FBI to do so, at least not in his tenure as CIA director from 1966 to 1973.

"Mr. Hoover had no stomach for it," Helms said of the late FBI director. "He wasn't interested. Therefore he wouldn't do it."

At one point in the hearing, Committee Chairman Birch Bayh (D-Ind.) said that there had been efforts in the past on the CIA's part "to not let Congress have the information or make Congress believe something was happening a little different than it actually is."

Helms denied this flatly, calling it

an "illusion... part of the mythology of Washington."

"I don't know of any director, at least during my time, who fiddle-faddled with the Congress," Helms insisted. When a member of the House or Senate got a CIA briefing, Helms said, "he got the martini straight up—not on the rocks."

Sen. Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz.) said he was convinced that "a sizable part of the Congress" is "opposed to intelligence" along with significant segments of the media.

"You have only to read any daily paper of the East Coast or the West Coast to make that sad discovery," Goldwater said. "There's more leaks here than there are in the men's room at Anheuser-Busch." He said he intended to sponsor legislation "directed at the misuse of information gathered through intelligence sources."

Helms suggested that the Senators also consider exempting the intelligence agencies from "the endless incursions and inquiries" of the Freedom of Information Act, which he charged has had a "devastating" effect.

Moynihan expressed his concern about the "massive" spying by the KGB (the Soviet Union's Committee for State Security) on Americans and the lack of public indignation over that, for which Moynihan blamed American liberals. He predicted a bleak day of reckoning.

"God, we will have a lot to explain," Moynihan exclaimed. "It will not be a happy occasion... I fear of the consequences for American liberalism."

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